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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 003474

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIANS "SLOWING" WITHDRAWAL UNTIL AMISOM
REINFORCEMENTS

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) This cable contains an ACTION REQUEST in paragraph 7.

SUMMARY

12. (S/NF) Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told Ambassador on December 31 that Ethiopia is "slowing" its troops' withdrawal from Mogadishu and Somalia until Ugandan and Burundian reinforcements arrive for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Meles said that if AMISOM reinforcements will not be deployed or will be delayed long, then the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) will accelerate its departure plans. The Prime Minister reiterated earlier remarks to the Ambassador that an "orderly departure" from Somalia for AMISOM means that AMISOM forces would depart first, followed by Ethiopian forces, who would provide force protection during AMISOM's withdrawal. The Prime Minister added, however, that AMISOM could survive in Somalia on its own if its contingents are properly reinforced and redeployed to the airport and seaport. The Prime Minister cautioned that after the ENDF leaves, the United States, the African Union (AU) and others should have contingency plans in place in case the AMISOM mission cannot survive independent of Ethiopian support. This would call for United States (and other) warships to secure the seaport to allow AMISOM to exit safely. Meles restated Ethiopia's obligation to protect AMISOM forces. End Summary.

SLOW ROLL

13. (S/NF) Prime Minister Meles told Ambassador in a private conversation December 31 that he appreciated the United States' support for AMISOM and Ethiopia's Somalia operations. He stated that he and his Chief of Defense Staff, General Samora, ordered a "slow-down" in the withdrawal of ENDF troops from Mogadishu to Baidoa, and then to Ethiopia, pending the quick reinforcement of AMISOM forces by Uganda and Burundi. When asked about timelines, the Prime Minister stated that if Uganda and Burundi are not going to reinforce their troops, or if there is a long delay in reinforcements, then Ethiopian forces will have to reassess and "speed up" withdrawal. The Prime Minister asked for information and advice from the United States on Uganda and Burundi reinforcements. Military commanders from both Uganda and Burundi are in Addis, and the Prime Minister said he would also keep the United States informed if there is a change in

ENDF plans for withdrawal.

OPTIMUM SOLUTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

14. (S/NF) The Prime Minister reiterated his comments to the Ambassador from a December 22 private conversation that the only way to minimize risk to, and maximize the safety of, AMISOM forces upon Ethiopia's departure would be through an "orderly departure," which would entail AMISOM departing first, followed by the Ethiopians, who would protect their flank. Such an "orderly departure" would meet Ethiopia's obligation to President Museveni to protect the safety of Ugandan troops and ensure their safe exit, Meles said. The Prime Minister reiterated to the Ambassador that, though it would be high risk, AMISOM operations could in Somalia could continue if two conditions are met: first, AMISOM must be reinforced quickly; and second, AMISOM must redeploy to the airport and seaport.

15. (S/NF) Should AMISOM prove incapable of holding off extremists in the wake of Ethiopia's departure from Mogadishu and require emergency evacuation, Prime Minister Meles suggested that United States and other warships could secure the seaport to assist the departure of AMISOM forces. The burden of supporting AMISOM's withdrawal would then fall on the countries whose warships are patrolling the Somali coast, Meles added.

16. (S/NF) During the Ambassador's December 22 private meeting with Meles, the Prime Minister had said that the reason for

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AMISOM to stay in Somalia would be the signal the international community's commitment to stabilizing Somalia and to avoid an extremist take-over of the country. Further, AMISOM's continued presence would signal to all Somali stakeholders that AMISOM would likely fold into a United Nations peacekeeping operation in the near future, and also that the Djibouti accords can be implemented with a new government of national unity that would more effectively reach out to other clans and former Islamic Court members.

COMMENT/ACTION REQUEST

17. (S/NF) Prime Minister Meles underscored his responsibility to President Museveni to protect Ugandan troops in AMISOM operations. Meles has slowed down ENDF withdrawals based on this obligation. Nevertheless, time is short and the ENDF will soon speed up its departure plans if additional AMISOM troops are not forthcoming soon. Public frustration at home and growing opposition within the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is forcing Meles to ensure that Ethiopian forces are out in an expeditious manner. ACTION REQUEST: Please advise what information we can pass to the Ethiopians on when, and if, AMISOM will be reinforced, and the timeline. End Comment/Action Request. YAMAMOTO